



John L. Salomone
Town Manager

TOWN OF NEWINGTON

131 CEDAR STREET
NEWINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06111

MAYOR STEPHEN WOODS

MINUTES

NEWINGTON TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING

Conference Room L-101 Lower Level – Town Hall
7:00 P.M.

March 18, 2015

The Special Meeting was called to order by Mayor Woods at 7:00 p.m.

I. Pledge of Allegiance

II. Roll Call

Councilor Borjeson - absent
Councilor Castelle
Councilor DelBuono
Councilor Klett
Councilor Marocchini
Councilor McDonald
Councilor Nagel
Mayor Woods

Staff in Attendance

John Salomone, Town Manager
Ann Harter, Director of Finance
Lisa Masten, Library Director
Lisa Rydecki, Deputy Director of Finance
Jaime Trevethan, Asst. to the Town Manager

III. Public Participation – on agenda

Mady Kenney, 53 Crestview Drive (via telephone): Ms. Kenney cautioned the Council not to cut the Library's budget and praised its programs, staff and resources. She stated that the Library serves every resident of the Town in so many ways, at no cost to the residents who use the services.

Anita Wilson, 278 Connecticut Avenue: Mrs. Wilson noted that the Library has been asked for the last several years to submit a zero-percent increase budget, which with inflation has actually been a loss for the Library each year. She indicated that this year's budget with a 3% reduction will have a significant impact on the Library's operations, resulting on cutting Sunday hours for the entire school year. Mrs. Wilson indicated that she has been a member of the Friends of the Library for 30 years and has always lobbied to increase hours, resulting in the addition of Saturday and Sunday hours throughout the years.

She indicated that the Library is a cultural center and serves all residents. She stated that closing on Sundays will decrease the service to residents. She requested that the Council restore the Library's budget to its previous level.

Leanne Manke, 120 Northwood Road: Mrs. Manke indicated that she is proud to be a member of the Library Board. She asked the Council to reconsider cuts and fully fund the Library's budget. She noted the importance of technology, computers, internet access and printers to the residents. She noted, in particular, how the Library assists residents without internet access with filing and printing tax forms. She indicated that cutting Sunday hours could result in some residents not being able to visit the Library as needed.

Natalie Harbeson, 319 Lloyd Street: Ms. Harbeson noted that the Town holds its Library in high regard, except during budget season. She stated that the Town should increase the Library's budget in order to increase services to the residents. She stated that the cuts boggle her minds and urged the Council to restore the Library's budget in order to preserve Sunday hours.

Ellen Vessella, 31 Northwood Road: Mrs. Vessella indicated that she is a member of the Library Board of Trustees. She noted a recent comment from a patron thanking the Library for being open on Sunday afternoons, especially during the cold winter. The patron also thanked the Library for providing internet access.

IV. Consideration of Old Business

a. Budget Review: Library

Town Manager Salomone remarked that the Town is not anti-Library and remarked that the Town has been supportive of the Library. He indicated that he asked all Town departments to make cuts and some were more difficult than others. He indicated that the Library was given the choice on which cuts to take and he did not give a directive to cut hours. He stated that there are other areas that could be considered for cuts and noted that the Library provides many services. He stated that he would support any reductions that do not involve a cut in hours. He stated that all cuts are difficult and he realizes the value of the Library.

Library Director Lisa Masten as well as Library Board President Anna Eddy and Board Member Patty Foley addressed the Town Council.

Ms. Eddy acknowledged the Board members in attendance. She spoke on behalf of the Library's budget. She noted that the Library has been asked to cut its budget. She stated that the increase in the budget the previous year includes approved payroll increases rather than increases to the operating budget. Ms. Eddy indicated the following:

- In December 2014, the Library submitted a budget request of \$1,754,953 with the only increase due to contractual payroll increases.
- The Town Manager submitted a proposed Library budget of \$1,715,083, a \$39,840 reduction to the Library's request. Of this, about \$13,000 is in anticipated personnel changes, resulting in a cut of about \$26,900 to the operating budget.

Ms. Eddy stated that the Board reluctantly supported the Director's recommendation to cut all Sunday openings for the year. She stated that this will also severely impact materials purchases which in turn will affect and hinder the Library's ability to serve the patrons. She stated that cuts will result in circulation materials becoming stagnant, causing patrons to go elsewhere. She stated that the Library cannot continue to keep pace with the communities' needs and level of service with continued budget cuts. Ms. Eddy indicated that the Library has been open on Sundays since 1997 and averages 300 visitors and hundreds of items circulated during the 4-hour Sunday openings. She stated that the Library is the one service available to all residents. She stated that over 377,000 items were circulated by the Library from July 2013 through July 2014. She remarked that the Library is important to residents who wish to use its services on Sundays, including families, regular patrons, seniors, teens, job seekers, students and those who work evenings and cannot visit during weekday or Saturday hours. She stated that cutting Sunday

hours will save a few dollars but will be a disservice to the residents. She stated that you cannot have a first-rate library with continued budget cuts.

Ms. Foley indicated that in March, 2010 the Library Board members addressed the Council on the budget, and will so again. She stated that the Library receives one and one-half cents of every dollar collected in the Town's budget. She stated that five years ago the Board was debating a cut of \$30,000; and this year, again debating a cut of about \$26,000. She stated that for every dollar spent on the Library the Library returns \$20.00 in services and value. She indicated that the annual cost of the Library is \$57.00 per capita and that the \$26,000 cut will save each taxpayer \$0.89. She stated that closing the Library for any number of hours locks resources away from the residents. She stated that the materials budget has actually decreased yearly due to inflation and the increased cost of materials. She stated that electronic items account for only 9% of the Library's total circulation. Ms. Foley commented that the Library has an innovative group of people working on a zero-increase budget for close to a decade. She urged the Council to restore the Library budget.

Councilor DelBuono asked for the Library's current hours. Mrs. Masten replied that the Library is open Monday – Thursday 10:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m., Friday and Saturday 10:00 – 5:00 and Sunday's during the school year 1:00 – 5:00. Councilor McDonald inquired about the rationale behind not making any cuts to data services, children's services and materials related to reference and community services. Mrs. Masten replied that data services are through a paid consortium with 30 other libraries and it would not be wise to cut that consortium. Mrs. Masten stated that in terms of materials, the Library often has to buy materials in various format and must also buy materials and online databases to support the schools and students' needs. She stated that these tie into the school curriculum.

The Council reviewed the Library budget:

711 Operations

- Decrease in salaries due to personnel changes

712 Children's Services

- Decrease in salaries and overtime, reduced hours due to closing on Sundays

713 Reference and Community Services

- Decrease in salaries and overtime, reduced hours due to closing on Sundays
- Funding reallocated from Dues and Subscriptions to address increased demand for downloadable media.

714 Building

- Decrease in salaries and overtime, reduced hours due to closing on Sundays
- Increase in annual fees for security cameras

715 Collection Management

- Increase in salaries due to staff changes and step increases

716 Circulation

- Decrease in salaries and overtime, reduced hours due to closing on Sundays

Councilor Nagel inquired as to how Library usage on Sundays compares with usage during the rest of the week. Ms. Foley replied that an average 75 patrons per hour use the Library on Sundays, which is approximately the same average hourly usage as the other days of the week. Councilor Klett indicated that the needs of the weekend users may differ than those who use the Library during the week. Councilor Marrocchini inquired about whether staffing schedules could be adjusted to avoid Sunday overtime. Mrs. Masten replied that schedules and overtime are determined per union contract. Mayor Woods suggested that this be discussed during the next union contract negotiations.

Mayor Woods stated that the Council will work to restore as much of the budget as possible and indicated that several departments have important budget needs which must be balanced. Town Manager Salomone indicated that he agreed with much of the Library Board and staff's analysis and noted that the

Library's utilities and maintenance were consolidated with other facilities several years ago, resulting in a savings to the Town.

b. Budget Review: Parks and Recreation

Town Manager Salomone announced that P&R Superintendent Bruce Till will retire effective April 14, 2015. He noted that Mr. Till was initially hired intending to be only a "temporary" assignment, but stayed with the Town for over 6.5 years. Town Manager Salomone and the Council thanked Mr. Till for his service. Mayor Woods commended Mr. Till for getting departmental costs under control during his tenure.

The Council reviewed the Parks and Recreation budget:

810 Administrative

- Significant reductions made in full time salaries, since a portion of salaries are now paid from revenues from the park funds. This is not a cut in personnel.

831 Grounds Maintenance

- Seasonal hours reduced. The department uses long and short-term seasonal staff as needed and through contract negotiations is allowed to hire more long-term seasonal staff. The amount of short-term seasonal staff has been reduced due to the efficiencies of longer-term seasonal staff.
- The budget includes sidewalk and parking lot snow removal for town facilities and schools.

832 Cemeteries

- Budget includes carpet and furnishings for the addition to the chapel.
- This budget is reimbursed by the cemetery budget fund.

Councilor Marocchini inquired as to what will happen when the cemetery no longer has any plots to sell. Mrs. Harter replied that there is a reserve fund in place for the future. Town Manager Salomone noted that the cemetery is nowhere near full and may be expanded in the future.

833 Historical Properties

- No significant changes

834 Tree Maintenance

- Some work in this area is in collaboration with the Town of Wethersfield
- Reflects the replacement of removed roadside trees

Councilor Castelle inquired about the replacement of trees on Crestview Drive. Town Manager Salomone indicated that the tree replacement program is included in this budget item.

c. Budget Review: Other Programs Not Previously Discussed

Town Manager Salomone indicated that several memos have been sent to the Town Council regarding previous Council budgetary questions, including tax sales/delinquent taxes, pool maintenance and attendance, IT budget and voting districts.

Town Manager Salomone indicated that the Revenue Collector is contemplating holding tax sales and stated that the process will start in April. Mrs. Harter stated that a specific procedure must be followed in order to hold a tax sale and that if the process starts in April the actual sales are likely to take place in August. The Council discussed the process. Councilor McDonald remarked that tax sales are not to be taken lightly, as they indicate that there are residents who are struggling. She stated that this illustrates the difficult task of the Council to balance the budget. Councilor DelBuono inquired about tax sale properties listed as "unusable". Mrs. Harter indicated that these are small parcels of non-developable land that were offered but not sold at the previous tax sale. Town Manager Salomone stated that those properties are of little value to anyone, except possibly a neighbor who may wish to purchase an adjoining property. Mayor Woods indicated that many property owners often pay their delinquent taxes when faced with a tax sale and also stated that property owners have the opportunity to re-purchase their

property if sold, by paying taxes due plus applicable interest and fees within six months of the sale. Town Manager Salomone reiterated that tax sales are serious situations taken as a last resort and that a specific process must be followed. Councilor Castelle inquired about the results of the last tax sale. Mrs. Harter replied that approximately 80% of the property owners paid past-due taxes to avoid the sale and approximately five properties were sold at auction. Mayor Woods indicated that with some of the vacant properties, the taxes due are more than the value of the property.

Mayor Woods inquired about budget section 950 – Contributions. Town Manager Salomone indicated the following:

- The Town's contribution to the Memorial Day Parade fund is the same as past years.
- The Town's contribution to NCTV has been reduced due to a two-year project to convert to high definition, which is complete as of the upcoming fiscal year.
- The Town will contribute \$2,500 to the Newington Fire Department Association for maintenance of their building.

The Council reviewed table 7 of the CIP budget. Town Manager Salomone indicated that the chart projects long-term debt. Councilor Castelle noted that the CIP is set up in such a way that the Town's debt shall not exceed more than 2% of the Town's Grand List or 6% of expenditures. He stated that both are reasonable parameters that were set several years ago and something that the Council should consider reviewing. The Council discussed the \$30 million figure set for the previous referendum and indicated that the new Town Hall Building Committee has not suggested a budget for the new project. The Council discussed long-term debt versus pay-as-you-go for several projects.

V. Public Participation – on Agenda

Alison Clarke, 25 Wilbur Drive: Ms. Clarke thanked those who were involved with the recent agreement regarding Cedar Mountain and for respecting the Conservation Commission's decision. She inquired whether the Town is in negotiations in regards to purchasing the property and whether such purchase will go to referendum.

Patty Foley, 51 Crown Ridge: Ms. Foley thanked the Council for its efforts. She stated that she works with tax collectors throughout the State regarding tax sales and urged the Town to make every assurance that property owners who are subject to a tax sale are properly notified. She stated that NCTV is a wonderful organization that operates on a small budget and asked the Council to support NCTV. Ms. Foley asked what the Town and residents can do to maintain and improve neighborhood parks through volunteerism. She inquired about the rate used in the amortization of principle and interest in the CIP table 7.

Natalie Harbeson, 319 Lloyd Street: She stated that she did not intend to imply that the Town does not support its Library – it just doesn't support it enough. She thanked the Council for its efforts.

VI. Remarks by Councilors

Mayor Woods indicated that there have been no formal negotiations regarding the Cedar Mountain parcel at this time; therefore there is no price available. He stated that negotiations would need to take place in executive session and once an agreement has been reached the Council will consider how to obtain funding for the purchase.

Councilor Klett inquired noted a recent meeting with Town staff, Councilor Nagel and the Public Land Trust. She inquired whether the group will come before the Council and/or be used as a resource for Cedar Mountain land acquisition. Town Manager Salomone replied that the group is interested in helping the Town if they are able, and will come back to the Town with a proposal if possible. Councilor Nagel stated that the process will be transparent and if the group does present a proposal, it will come to the Council with information. Councilor Klett inquired about the timeline for the proposal. Town Manager Salomone replied that it would take approximately a month. Mayor Woods indicated that the group offers resources, but not funding. Town Manager Salomone replied that while the group's main purpose is to provide expertise, they may be able to provide some funding in terms of in-kind services related to a referendum.

VII. Adjournment

Councilor Castelle moved to adjourn at 9:10 p.m. and was seconded by Councilor McDonald. The motion passed 7 – 0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jaime Trevethan
Assistant to the Town Manager - Administration